

Draft reply to the Consultation on Rail Action Plan for Kent

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council welcomes the Rail Action Plan for Kent and wishes to support this document, subject to some additional comments.

The Rail Forum staged by the County Council last November was excellent and it put the rail industry, the train operating company, Network Rail and the Department for Transport (DfT) on notice that the County Council, the District Councils and Parish Councils of Kent together with the many rail user groups were all deeply serious and motivated about the next franchise.

Between then and now we have had the swingeing increases in fares and the poor performance of Southeastern Railway over the winter period to further reinforce everyone's intention that next time it will be better and that there will be a sharper focus on the emerging specification for the next franchise and a closer scrutiny of the commissioning process.

The draft Plan is admirably comprehensive and pays good attention to the needs of rail passengers in West Kent. The key issues that concern us are well covered. Services on the West Malling/Maidstone line are highlighted. The importance of fares, timetables and service performance are well to the fore.

The following comments are not a criticism; just a pointer to what we believe will make the coverage of the document that bit more complete as far as the needs of this area are concerned.

- The mention of high speed services on the Medway Valley line is welcome. We should include the need for a stop within this Borough.
- West Kent services are already over-crowded in the peak and we should be seeking specific measures to deal with this as it can only deteriorate over the period of the next franchise.
- We fully support the ambition of a direct service to Gatwick from wider Kent. What we should really be pushing for is the reinstatement of the Surrey part of the line into the Kent Integrated Franchise area. Without this, we fear that the importance of this line for Kent and the potential for securing the direct link and enhancing services will be prejudiced.
- Service speeds on the mid Kent line are mentioned but we feel this needs even more emphasis. It cannot be right that journey times on this line into London, and a part of London that most people do not want to go to, are slower than they were over half a century ago.
- Station improvement and station parking are also mentioned but, again, these could have far greater emphasis. In particular, the parking, if just left to chance as it currently seems to be, will result in more

situations similar to what we now are experiencing around Hildenborough station; extensive lengths of country lane obstructed by all day commuter parking to the detriment of the access and safety local community.

In summary, it is a fine document and it signals a worthy intention by the County Council to coordinate the ambitions of all interested parties in Kent for a better railway service under the next franchise. This Borough is keen to support that collective effort and contribute to it.